ACTION EA-8

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

44

FOR RM USE ONLY

A-197 NO. CONFIDENTIAL HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : DEPARTMENT OF STATE

INFO : DANANG, BANGKOK, VIENTIANE, CINCPAC

FROM : Amembassy SAIGON

Date of Action: September 19, 1967

SUBJECT : Youth, Students, and Elections

REF : Saigon A-104
Saigon 4785

EXCISE

Summary

As expected, Saigon Students Union have protested strongly against the "rigging" of the September 3 election, and they are seeking the invalidation of the elections by the National Assembly. The Student Group of the Faculty of Science has taken the lead in organizing protest meetings and boycotts of exams and classes. Protests sponsored by this group are beginning to take a pacifist and anti-American tone. These students claim to be acting independently and we are not yet sure whether they are being led by other political forces; however they are finding natural allies among defeated Presidential and Senatorial candidates and other groups with various reasons to be dissatisfied with the election results. On the other hand, Catholic students and some youth leaders are inclined to accept the results of the September 3 election and, if possible, work with President-elect Thieu. Saigon newspapers have covered the student protests but neither press nor public has shown particular sympathy for them thus far, although Hanoi's Viet-Nam News Agency has reported them in exaggerated terms. Students are planning further demonstrations; the size, nature, and impact of these manifestations will depend on the play of other political forces.

* * * *

On September 9 the Saigon Students Union's Committee of Representatives (of the 14 faculties and higher schools of the university), its Permanent Commission, and the Student Committee Against Rigged Elections (formed August 28) met at SSU headquarters and "found that the presidential and senatorial election of September 3, 1967: - was a rigged election (and) was arranged by a foreign hand." They then 1) declared that the election was rigged; 2) denied the results of the.

COPYFLO-PBR

CONFIDENTIAL

FORM DS-323 4-62

FOR DEPT. USE ONLY In Out

Drafted by: POL:LHHyde:lc 9/18/67

Contents and Classification Approved by: POL:TMRecknagel

Clearances: POL:TCronin

EXCISE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY [signature] DATE 12/24/81
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

election because "it did not conform to democratic practices;" 3) denounced before national and international opinion the "pre-arrangement" of the election results; 4) requested the Assembly to cancel the election, and 5) announced the enlargement of the Student Committee Against Rigged Election into the "Youth, University and High School Student Committee " Fighting for Democracy."

On September 12 about 30 or 40 members of the Student Group of the Faculty of Science broke into second baccalaureate examinations next door at Petrus Ky school and persuaded some students - accounts differ on how many - to tear up their exam papers and leave the rooms. The Student Group of the Faculty of Science then issued a declaration in its name and that of the Student Committee Against Rigged Election, calling on all students to boycott their exams and classes (which are not yet in session) to protest against the "rigged election" and "the plot to establish a second Diem regime to strangle freedom and democracy." Although the City Police Headquarters are across Cong Hoa Boulevard from the Science Faculty and Petrus Ky School, the police did not intervene and Prefect Police Chief Lt. Col. Nguyen van Luan described the matter as an "internal affair of the students, having nothing to do with public order." The same afternoon, students boycotted their entrance examination to the Faculty of Medicine.

On the same day the Permanent Committee of the Student Group of the Science Faculty issued a declaration objecting to past "pressures to disqualify opposition lists" and "pressures by the government to get the Assembly to approve the Thieu-Ky list". The declaration called on the Assembly and people to reject the results of the September 3 election, stated the Science Students' determination to boycott classes and exams to struggel for this objective, and called on students in other faculties of Saigon University, and in Viet-Nam's four other universities, to join in the struggle.

On the morning of September 13 a projected student march from SSU headquarters up Tu Do Street to the Assembly failed to take place. The demonstration was not authorized by GVN, and large numbers of police on hand discouraged students from taking action. In addition Catholic student groups were not unhappy with election results and showed no disposition to participate.

On the afternoon of September 13 police entered the Science Faculty Secretariat to ask for names and addresses of students involved in recent protests. The Faculty Secretary-General said he had no authority to give out the information. Later that afternoon two police jeeps re-entered the campus to take down posters and banners proclaiming the student position. This provoked still another student declaration, denouncing this "undemocratic" police action "in violation of university autonomy."

DECLASSIFIED

On September 14, Science Student Committee wrote to Chairmen of Assembly and of Central Election Council, urging rejection of September 3 election results. The Higher School of Agriculture issued a proclamation stating they would oppose "in all ways" the September 3 election.

On the morning of September 15 Science Students hosted a big student meeting, attracting a crowd estimated by students at 2000 and by others at from 500 to 1000. Representatives of other student groups were present; defeated presidential candidates Truong dinh Dzu and Vu hong Khanh showed up as did representatives of Phan khac Suu and of 11 defeated Senate lists.

According to accounts of meeting by Saigon Daily News and Song newspapers, student speakers recalled the student struggles of 1963 against Diem and 1964 against Nguyen Khanh, and called on students to participate in a demonstration "if there is one" to ask the Assembly to reject the September 3 election results. The meeting took a pacifist tone, with Pham hao Quang, Vice-Chairman for Internal Affairs of the Science Student Group, claiming that the eight "peace" Presidential lists had outpolled the "war" candidates (Thieu, Co, and Binh) by three million votes to 1.8 million. Quang also detailed examples of election rigging -- rejection of lists because of security reasons or for pro-Communist activities, stealing votes, wrong announcements, and so forth.

The highlight of meeting was Dzu, who said the election was completely rigged and that he would have won if it had been honest. He added that current court charges against him for bad check writing were a GVN effort to discredit him. He accused Thieu of selling Viet-Nam's sovereignty to the United States and criticized American influence in Viet-Nam. Dzu concluded: "I am determined to oppose Thieu-Ky and I don't fear those punks (thang dan em)."

The declaration which issued from this meeting stated that the September 3 election was "completely rigged under the auspices of the American government". For the Assembly to accept the election results would be "to lose national sovereignty and lose the country." The declaration introduced a new element in denouncing "the escalation policy of the American government" as "contrary to the wishes of the Vietnamese people." It demanded rejection of the September 3 election results, and an immediate end to American interference in Vietnamese affairs and to US escalation activities, and said the Science Students are "determined to oppose to the end acceptance in any form or fashion of this election." Hanoi's Vietnam News Agency on September 17 reported this meeting and resolution in typically exaggerated and slanted terms, citing AFP as a source.

An Embassy officer talked on September 15 with Pham hao Quang, who explained that by "American interference in Vietnamese internal affairs"

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

students meant approval of election results by American officials before the Assembly had spoken on the legality of election. The Embassy officer asked why students themselves were rushing into print with claims that elections were rigged before the Assembly had made its decision. Quang replied that the Assembly had shown, in its approval of the Thieu-Ky candidacy in July that it was subject to pressure (from General Loan in the gallery); hence the students want to create early counterpressure to stiffen the Assembly's backbone. Quang admitted that students had neither sent observers to polls nor submitted complaints to Assembly as permitted by electoral law. He explained that the students had seen, and agreed with, complaints submitted by defeated candidates. As the Department knows, these complaints amount essentially to objection to Thieu-Ky use of the advantages of incumbency.

We understand that Science Students held a closed meeting night of September 15 to organize efforts to get support from other faculties and universities for a "big demonstration."

Comment: Saigon Students Union and Science Student Group both claim to be acting independently of any other political forces, and thus far we cannot positively link them to any other group. There is speculation that they are linked with, or at least being used by the Viet Cong, Truong dinh Dzu, Thich Tri Quang, and/or Nguyen cao Ky and Nguyen ngoc Loan. Students with whom the Embassy officer has talked appear to be hot-eyed nationalists who demand instant peace, democracy, and withdrawal of foreign influence, while glossing over difficulties involved.

Meanwhile, the Youth Committee to Build Democracy has completed a study of observations made by eight "flying teams" in all four Corps areas during election day. [redacted] told Embassy officer the teams found some irregularities but he tacitly admitted that they were not significant enough to change the result. He said he did not plan to publish the Committee's findings because they would be twisted by both supporters and critics of the election, and he indicated that the reports' value is merely "academic." It appears that [redacted] and many of his friends in the National Youth Commission have basically accepted election results and are looking forward, with Tran van Huong forces, either to jobs in the new Thieu government or to the chance of victory in the Lower House election. Despite evocation by radical student leaders of student struggles against Diem and Khanh, most students do not appear to feel as oppressed now as they did then, or as convinced that bringing down the government is possible or would be followed by something more desirable. Moreover, student anti-rigging manifestations thus far have not gained particular support from the press or the public.

b-1
p.d

We expect continuing efforts to organize demonstrations aimed at influencing the Assembly's decision on validation of the election. The size, nature, and impact of the demonstration will depend mainly on the interplay of student groups with the other political forces interested in this question.

BUNKER

CONFIDENTIAL